

POLICY AND POWER OF THE A. P. A.

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THE American Protective Association, or as it is more generally known, the A. P. A., is now in the tenth year of its existence. No organization in the history of the American Republic ever had so spontaneous a birth, so remarkable a career, so radical an effect upon American politics, or has been the subject of such general interest and friendly and adverse comment as this association, while no institution has been so widely misrepresented or misunderstood.

The American Protective Association is neither a religious body nor an institution adverse to the religion, *per se*, of any person, sect, or faith. It was organized neither to oppose the religious dogmas of any ecclesiastical corporation, nor to direct, dissect, maintain, or destroy theology, old or new. While I am fully aware that the opponents of the association, and those who, though not opposing, are uninformed, assert to the contrary, and while I am also aware that the indiscreet expressions of individual members of the order here and there have occasionally given color to such assertions, the constitution of the association does not, nor does the ritual nor secret work of the organization, warrant any such conception of the purposes of the order or any such construction of its principles.

Whether legitimately, as its advocates claim, or illegitimately, as its enemies maintain, the A. P. A. was the child of the conditions which conceived it, and not even the most antagonistic casuist will argue, in the face of philosophy and history, that so great a political revolution as that which the organization has accomplished within the short space of nine years was the absolute offspring either of religious bigotry or ignorance, though,

doubtless, like all revolutions, tinctured by the one and impeded by the other. Though cranks and bigots may combine and cause infinite mischief locally for a short time, they do not affect an entire nation nor leave their imprint upon national politics and legislation in the degree which the A. P. A. has done in its brief existence. This much at least must be conceded even by the opponents of the association.

It would be superfluous to introduce into an article of this kind the specific reasons leading up to the founding of the order, more especially as they have been discussed at some length in the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* of July, 1894, and again in August, 1895—or to introduce arguments *pro* or *con*. The reasons advanced by the founders of the order for its institution were based, practically, upon the following grounds:

I. That the spirit of the National Constitution was being violated in various ways by certain persons and bodies in the United States.

II. That certain members and sections of the national government were in connivance with the said violators.

III. That the conditions governing our national immigration were such as to weaken our democratic institutions and form of government and to substitute therefor a system of government not in harmony therewith.

IV. That the immigrant vote, under the direction of certain ecclesiastical institutions, had become so dominant a factor in politics as to virtually control it.

V. That this domination had resulted in political prostitution, corruption, and favoritism of the worst kind.

VI. That the great majority of the American people, while painfully cognizant of the sinister and debasing results of these conditions, and desirous of amending them, were either ignorant of any efficient means of counter-organization, or fearful of the injury to their personal interests at the hands of their powerful and organized opponents.

The current history of the period to which I refer must answer the question whether the projectors of the American Protective Association were right or wrong in their assumptions.

Although, in effect, the efforts of the organization were directed against an institution nominally theological, they were intended to antagonize only those sections of the institution which

were political as well as theological, or subversive of the principles of the National Constitution and the laws and statutes of the land. Nor was the association formed for the mere purpose of combating what its founders considered the unpatriotic attitude and politically demoralizing influences of any one or more theological bodies in particular, but rather to erase from our national statutes all legislation which had been enacted in opposition to the constitution, and to erect a barrier of legislative enactments between the church and the state that should be eternal, and prevent a recurrence of those conditions which, at that period, threatened to exalt the *ipse dixit* of the ecclesiast above the sovereign will of the people, and render the state subservient to the interests, will, and caprice of the church. The A. P. A., then, was founded, not as an organization specifically hostile to any existent institution, but rather as the exponent and champion of a principle to be maintained against all antagonistic influences, existent or prospective, whatsoever.

While there existed, and still exist, several religious sects whose principles materially conflict with the principles enunciated in the National Constitution, and which, if permitted to obtain, would result in a union of church and state, with the church the dictator, it is not strange that the founders of the A. P. A. should have selected that sect as the special object of their antagonism whose past record was least reconcilable to American conditions, and which most strongly indicated through the authoritative past and current utterances of its representatives, an intention to pursue in the future that policy which had been so subversive of liberty of conscience and person in other days, and whose strength, organization, and ability of self-assertion rendered it the most dangerous to that sovereignty of the people which the signers of the Declaration of Independence endeavored to secure and perpetuate.

It has been asserted that the American Protective Association was a mere side issue of the Loyal Orange Institution. The assertion is incorrect. The founders of the association were all non-Orangemen save one, and without exception citizens of the United States, and with only one or two exceptions native born. The immense growth of the order, from efforts that were comparatively insignificant, indicated that, while not openly expressed or practically demonstrated before, the sentiments of a

large portion of the thinking public were identical with those expressed in the principles of the organization. For the first two or three years the growth of the order was practically spontaneous, indicating that the movement was neither a craze nor the conception of cranks, but the spark of consequences which fired a train of circumstances laid by corrupt legislators and self-seeking ecclesiasts and their adherents through a course of many years. It is not surprising that a sect so tenacious of its principles, the assumed rights of its head and the antiquity of its institutions, as the Papists of the United States, were in no mood to brook any abridgment of the privileges which the perfection of their political organization had secured to them, more particularly as they (the Irish Papists especially) had been the dominant and courted element in the politics and government of the nation for many years. Their reprisals for the political opposition of the A. P. A. took the form of the deadly boycott, politically, personally, socially, and in business. This boycott was prosecuted all the more harshly from the fact that the boycotters were composed for the greater part of the most illiterate elements of the nation. Nearly every member of the A. P. A. who made himself prominent in the movement retired absolutely ruined in politics and purse, and while hundreds of thousands sympathized and accorded to the order their passive support, only a small percentage dared brave the storm of disaster that inevitably followed membership in the order. These conditions led to the enforcement of absolute secrecy both as to membership and place of meeting, but to no purpose. The daily press, which was almost unanimously adverse to the movement, took special pains to hold the order up to public odium, and to publish its membership, while the two dominant parties used every effort to crush an organization which it soon became palpable to both they could not use without seriously disarranging their own political machinery. This was the period of guerrilla warfare, when the order was too weak to meet the forces of their opponents openly in the field of politics without the certainty of defeat. It was also the period when the acts of the order were almost entirely defensive and absolutely negative.

Following this came the period of construction and organization, when the administration of the order applied itself to the adjustment of its political machinery, and its agents began to

make the principles of the organization known through many states. In a large number of our important cities the seed thus sown produced great results, and councils numbering as high as 3,000 in membership were to be found in such cities as Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, Cleveland, etc. Then followed a series of sharp, decisive political victories for the order, which surprised the oldest of political campaigners. I do not wish to be understood that the nominees of the order were generally elected; on the contrary, there were few politicians who could afford to go upon record as the candidates of, or who were acceptable to, the order, which pursued its negative policy, using its influence against the candidate with a bad political record, leaving his opponents to scramble for office among themselves; and, in this regard, it is doing the organization but simple justice to state that the Protestant candidate whose political record was bad fared no better than a Papist of the same stripe. The result, however, was undeniably creditable both to the order and to politics generally, and undoubtedly served to elevate the standard of the latter. At this time the organization had little or no following in the South, and as the Democratic party in the North was too closely affiliated with the Papist vote, the result was that the majority of the nominees of the association were nominally Republican, Prohibition, or Populist, although numberless instances might be cited where worthy Democrats were singled out of a slate that was unworthy as a whole, and elected to offices of trust by the enormous majorities which the A. P. A. vote gave.

Although between the years 1890 and 1893, the initiated membership of the order never exceeded 70,000, and was scattered but sparsely through less than twenty states, it was a period of undoubted health and usefulness from the fact that affiliation with the order was rather a disadvantage than an advantage, as it attracted to its ranks the disinterested almost exclusively. The year 1893, however, showed such remarkable success for the order in the political field that the conditions changed and the ambitious politician suddenly awoke to the realization that baptism in A. P. A. water was attended with pleasant and profitable political consequences. Of these the earnest were, for the greater part, accepted; the unworthy were rejected to a large extent, but many found their way into the order through the carelessness of investigating committees.

In the two years that followed, the order planted itself firmly in every State and Territory in the Union and was instrumental in overturning the entire political machinery in New York, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and Iowa, and of California, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Washington, and Oregon, in part. With these victories commenced a general policy of active aggression and the negative tactics of the organization were practically abandoned. This, in my opinion, was a departure fraught with much danger, involving, as it necessarily must, entangling alliances with parties and political rings, and tending to destroy that political independence, without which the order must inevitably gravitate into the arms of one or other of the old parties and become absorbed. Fortunately the change brought its own rebuke, with sufficient force to demonstrate the danger of the departure as a general policy, a rebuke which the ingratitude of the old parties was mainly instrumental in administering. Party candidates, elected almost entirely through the efforts of the order, in many cases either repudiated their pledges or evaded them, and the experience, although bitter, was a most salutary one to the organization, which has wisely learned to distrust the pledge of those who do not possess the moral courage to make them openly or before the altars of the order.

The opening of the Fifty-fourth Congress demonstrated the power of the Organization in the political field as no event had previously done. Nearly one hundred members of the House of Representatives were elected to office, pledged to support the platform of the order, either as a whole or in part, while several members of the Senate were elected under similar conditions. It would be as unfair as it is untrue to assert that the great majority of these were honestly the friends of the American Protective Association or imbued with the principles of the organization. On the contrary, I am bound to admit, even although their subsequent conduct had not plainly revealed the fact, that many accepted A. P. A. principles as a means to the end of obtaining A. P. A. votes, and lost no time in repudiating the principles when their political interests suggested the repudiation. I am bound also to admit that, excepting a score or so of the members of the order, who now occupy seats in Congress, the representatives of that organization in that body are among the weakest and

least reliable members of the order. While I do not impugn the personal honor of these, their political good faith is certainly open to question, nor could any other result be expected when the governing conditions are examined. In no instance was a representative elected as an A. P. A. He was placed in office as a member of one or other of the existent political parties. Hence, he primarily was a member of the political party with which he was affiliated, and only secondarily a member of the organization, whose platform was considered injudicious even if not politically pernicious by all parties who were compelled to cater, more or less, to the "Catholic vote." Thus he stood in the position of a man with two masters, the one promising material, the other moral, rewards, the one threatening material, the other moral, punishments. While it is eminently to the credit of those who have maintained their obligations to the order entire, it must be confessed that the laxity of some of the political committees of the order, and the strong spirit of partyism which has prevailed in some sections, are to blame that all our representatives in the national Legislature are not primarily and entirely members of our order both nominally and practically. The aphorism that half a loaf is better than no bread has exercised a most pernicious and enervating influence upon the organization in many sections, pernicious because it has paved the way for compromises with those acts of the old parties which the order was organized most strenuously to resist; and enervating because it leads to the suggestion that the least of two evils is in itself good.

It should have been the unfaltering policy of all the political heads and boards of the association to maintain the position of endorsing no political candidate who was unprepared to pledge himself openly to the principles of the order, and, as an alternative, to place an independent candidate in the field, even in the face of inevitable defeat—defeat under such conditions being infinitely preferable to a victory so questionable, and involving such serious consequences to the order as in many cases it has.

While such mistakes perpetuated would have inevitably brought the career of the association to a sudden and inglorious close, they have more than served the purpose of awakening its membership to a realization of the extreme danger of a policy of compromise, in which the A. P. A. was so dominant before and so insignificant after election.

Except in a few sections where, from strong party affection, or other causes less honorable, party considerations have practically converted the order into party rings, the members of the organization have set their faces against such combinations, and, although a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat or Republican who is a stronger partisan than he is an A. P. A. may be found here and there in the order, the fact is due to one of two reasons: he either receives, or expects to receive, pecuniary equivalents for his loyalty, or else is in the order for the mere purpose of destroying it.

Much has been written of late regarding the action of the National Advisory Board of the order and the postulants for the Presidency of the United States, which has tended to mislead the public and to create the impression, even among some of the members of the order, that the supreme body had set itself up as the guardian of and dictator to the membership at large. Many of the daily newspapers have even asserted that the Executive Committee of the Advisory Board had issued a mandate for the slaughter of McKinley in the interest of Reed and Morton or Platt. Even were it true that the committee possessed such power, it is not the less true that any administration of the A. P. A., or any officer or board thereof, who were so imprudent as to issue a mandate or advisory circular advocating the support of any Presidential nominee who had not previously and uncompromisingly subscribed to the principles of the American Protective Association would find themselves in the position of a government without a people. Bradley and Linton are the only candidates who are to be considered as entirely unobjectionable to the order, but the utmost that the National Advisory or any other board or officer has the power to do is to advise, and even this advisory power is subject to the approval of the Supreme Council in session. The A. P. A. is a government of the people pure and simple, a government wherein the officers and boards are the mere servants and executors of the mandates of their electors, and the agents of political aspirants and party rings will save themselves countless money and much time who early realize the fact that no one member of the organization can deliver to any candidate more than one vote—his own—no matter whether he be private or officer, the chief of a board, or the Supreme President himself. The constitution

was framed to keep the order free from those evils which have made the old parties insufferable ; the moment this safeguard is broken down and the power is placed in the hands of any one man to deliver the votes of the order to any one person, party, or interest, the dissolution of the organization will have commenced.

The American Protective Association is the strongest and purest political force that the Western world ever knew. It grew from the parent stem of pure motives and patriotism. I have taken pains to point out its weaknesses and have dwelt but briefly upon its many merits. It is intensely human and, therefore, very imperfect, yet imperfect as it is there is nothing like it in the world. It holds the political balance of power in the United States, with its membership of nearly 2,500,000 persons, who influence at least 4,000,000 votes.

Finally it should not be forgotten that ninety-five per cent. of the members of the order are Americans first, A. P. A.'s next, and elements of party last of all ; and that, should the old parties refuse to publicly recognize and endorse the essential principles of the order, an independent Presidential candidate is not only a possibility but an absolute certainty, even though such a course should lead to the defeat of the dominant political party and the organization itself.

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